

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

ERRINGTON, Elizabeth Jane — *Emigrant Worlds and Transatlantic Communities: Migration to Upper Canada in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. Pp. 244.

In *Emigrant Worlds and Transatlantic Communities: Migration to Upper Canada in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Elizabeth Jane Errington takes the reader on a transatlantic journey from various corners of the British Isles to Upper Canada. In doing so, she reminds us that the resettlement of Upper Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century was undertaken by individual men and women with complex lives and varieties of motivations for leaving home and starting anew. As one of Canada's leading scholars on the social history and development of Upper Canada, Errington opens a fresh window into the personal world of emigration through a meticulous reading of the writings of emigrants and their families and an empathetic analysis of their emotional voyage.

Emigrant Worlds reverses the usual lens for research on migration to North America. Typical studies of migration “look ‘out’ from North America to try to understand how particular cultural practices and political propensities persisted and shaped New World societies” (p. 169). By contrast, Errington's study looks toward North America to understand what factors drove emigrants to leave home and abandon their familiar cultural practices and political propensities. She finds transatlantic communities in which familial networks were instrumental in establishing a new and broad sense of identity and home. Kinship ties and networks with friends and families who had gone before were often instrumental in forging connections and communities that made the emigrant's world navigable. Within this context, personal reasons for emigrating were often more pivotal than wide-scale socio-economic conditions. Decisions were very much shaped by the experiences of individual emigrants and the particular circumstances in their local communities and within their transatlantic interpersonal relationships.

Errington uses letters, diaries, and journals to examine the variety of reasons that convinced emigrants to go to British North America. She paints a vivid portrait of the physical and emotional stress that preparing to leave home brought upon emigrants, the peculiar culture and surreal experiences that connected emigrants aboard passenger ships on the Atlantic, and both the euphoric and disappointing emotions that welcomed emigrants into the “strange land.” Emigrant

writings certainly demonstrate that many “remained emotionally rooted more than three thousand miles away” (p. 137). In turn, for those who remained behind, the bonds were equally as strong. Through transatlantic webs of kin and community facilitated by letter-writing, the availability of newspapers, and, for those with the means, the occasional return visit home, the old world remained a part of the emigrants’ new world. The author furthermore broadens our historical imagination through an innovative reading of often overlooked information such as wanted notices printed in colonial newspapers. In doing so, she successfully teases out information about who the emigrants were, where they were from, for whom they were looking (or who was looking for them), and how emigration was a “family affair.”

Throughout the book, Errington takes the reader beyond a practical description of emigration and into poignant accounts of the joys and pains of leaving home. Departure, she argues, separated the emigrant from friends and family who were staying behind not only physically, but also emotionally. As emigrants negotiated the intricacies of arranging passage to the New World, sold their farms, possessions, and family heirlooms to raise funds for and lighten the load of travel, and found lodging while waiting to board the ship, the world of emigration “was now very real. It was a world with its own rules and customs, and for those in transit it was often bewildering and sometimes overwhelming” (p. 59). While reading this book, with its descriptive and telling accounts of the trials and tribulations of emigration, I could not help but imagine the harsh emotional journey of my own family who travelled across the Atlantic from Italy to Canada in the 1960s. Indeed, one of the striking features of emigrant writings in nineteenth-century Upper Canada is how closely they mirror those of their twentieth- and twenty-first-century counterparts. Errington’s empathetic analysis of these writings should certainly be commended by the reader with his or her own transnational web of kin and community.

Errington’s study does not offer any extensive data about migration. Those looking for information about wide-scale trends and patterns in the migratory history of Upper Canada will have to look elsewhere. Moreover, those seeking a broader interpretation concerning the significance of early nineteenth-century transatlantic communities to the making of a modern Canadian identity will be disappointed. Indeed, one of the major frustrations for the reader is that the author shies away from weaving her study into the public and political debates shaping Canadian society at the time. To be sure, the author makes clear that she did not set out to write such a macro-study, but rather one that extrapolates the “snapshots” of data on emigrants and their life experiences from the available historical record.

Emigrant Worlds raises a host of questions that should occupy scholars for years to come. Errington has opened new territory for studies of migration and society-building, not only for research on Upper Canada in the nineteenth century, but also for research examining the making of modern Canada to the present day. Much is written about the multicultural makeup of Canadian society and the importance of immigration in shaping Canada’s social, cultural, economic, and

political superstructures. Much less is written about the millions of kinship and family networks that connect Canadians to people in virtually every corner of the world and, conversely, people in virtually every corner of the world to Canadians. Errington's study of migration to Upper Canada not only offers a framework within which to build new understandings of nineteenth-century Upper Canadian society, but also it provides a framework for scholars wishing to undertake examinations of the matrices of twenty-first-century transatlantic and transpacific Canadian societies.

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FLEMING, R. B., ed. — *The Wartime Letters of Leslie and Cecil Frost 1915–1919*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007. Pp. 379.

In 1967 Leslie M. Frost, the Conservative premier of Ontario from 1949 until 1961, published *Fighting Men*, an excellent account of his battalion's service during the First World War. What is less well known is that Frost and his brother Cecil wrote more than 200 letters home to their parents during the war, of which 170 survive. These are now located in the archives of Trent University, and R. B. Fleming has organized and published them as a comprehensive collection. Taken as a whole, the letters are evocative, informative, and telling of the kind of place Canada was during the war and of how soldiers coped with training, combat, and, often, crushing boredom. For those interested in Frost's political career, the collection offers fresh insight into the formative years and events of his intellectual, ideological, and political development.

The Frosts were from Orillia; Leslie was 20 and Cecil 18 when they enlisted in 1915. Leslie wound up a junior officer in the 20th Battalion and Cecil a captain with the 2nd Machine Gun Brigade; both served in the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. They shipped to England in October 1916, with Leslie arriving in France in August 1917. He was seriously wounded in March 1918. Cecil arrived in November 1917 and was slightly wounded in October 1918, returning to active duty until the Armistice the following month.

The men were firmly rooted in family and community, and their correspondence reveals much about the social and political framework of the Dominion. Fleming's introduction is an interesting (though overlong) review of the Frost family and the history of the small Ontario town in which they grew up and to which they felt an intense attachment.

These richly detailed letters by intelligent, perceptive observers help us understand how middle-class English Canadians viewed the war, their country, the Empire, and themselves. Leslie comes across as a driven political "junkie" who, ironically, expressed increasing loathing for Canadian politicians of every stripe. He was deeply interested in goings-on in the Houses of Commons in Ottawa and London and often adopted the "high diction" of Empire in a manner